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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/28/2015  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENTS IN CONGRESS AND THE LEAD-UP TO MARCH  
CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. BOGOTA 10588

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 6143

[1](#)C. BOGOTA 5619

Classified By: CDA Milton K. Drucker, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: With less than a month remaining in the current session, the only major item to pass Congress thus far is the 2006 budget. A law aimed at approving Colombia's compliance with the Hague Convention on child abduction is pending conference committee approval. Opposition to Uribe torpedoed an attempt to allow reelection for governors and mayors. Members are focused on their own futures in elections to be held March 12, and the pace of legislative activity is even slower than the norm. Internal party decision-making on formal candidacies is ongoing, with lists due by January 28. Support for Uribe remains high among MOCs; nevertheless, they complain privately that Uribe has not provided them enough funds for discretionary spending in their districts going into the elections. Rumors continue of paramilitary intimidation of -- or support for -- individual candidates. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The current Congressional session will end December [1](#)15. The Congress will reconvene for the subsequent regular session on March 15 (running until June 20). In the current session, the only major law passed was the 2006 budget (see details Ref A). The full Senate approved (conference committee action pending) legislation aimed at improving Colombia's compliance with the Hague Convention on child abduction. (Comment: Post has consulted regularly with key members of Congress on the legislation, and at one point suggested wording changes that the Congress accepted and incorporated. End Comment.) Despite President Uribe's public support for the eighth overall attempt to modify the Constitution to allow for gubernatorial/mayoral reelection, opposition parties forced delays at the Senate committee level, making full approval impossible prior to December 15. (Comment: privately, several pro-Uribe MOCs expressed concern to us about gubernatorial/mayoral reelection, saying there are no level playing field guarantees at the local level. End Comment.) The Congress talked up protection of agricultural interests within the FTA context in several sessions, and a censure motion against the Minister of Communications (corruption allegations) was handily defeated by Uribista majorities.

[1](#)3. (SBU) MOCs have, in general, spent less time than normal (see Ref C) in Bogota in formal Congressional sessions, as the campaign season is now in full swing. All seats in both

houses (102 Senators, 166 Representatives) will be decided in elections on March 12. The elected will take office on July 120. The major parties are all involved in internal decision-making (centralized in all cases) regarding formal candidacies. Each party's Congressional nominees must be formalized by January 28.

14. (C) Press has reported prominent MOC complaints (including in face-to-face meetings with President Uribe) of intimidation of candidates by illegal armed groups -- in particular the paramilitaries. While we hear rumors of paramilitary money entering individual campaigns, evidence has not been forthcoming. Many MOCs also complain that Uribe has not provided them enough discretionary funds to campaign effectively.

DRUCKER